No. 22

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

"The baby is very ill," the girl informed him, then added hastily: "All evening it had convulsions."

R. of M. G., No. 22.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

THE QUESTION had been asked in a most peremptory manner, and it caused somewhat of a sensation. During the momentary and awed silence which had fallen, McLain kept his alert eyes focused on the physician. He seemed to be very eager to get a reply.

When the reply was slow in forthcoming, he asked again.

"What became of that chloroform?"

"That is a complete mystery to me," replied Dr. Pogue.

"You saw the broken chloroform bottle upstairs in your wife's room," the other went on relentlessly. "It must have been yours."

"That does not prove anything," the physician retorted. "There are thousands of bottles just like it. But aside from that, why should I want to kill my wife? While the relations between us were not always the most pleasant, I would have been the last man in all the world to want to harm her."

McLain laughed contemptuously.

"It is easy for you to say that," he sneered. "But let us review a few incontrovertible facts. As a rule I don't care to meddle with another man's private affairs. In this case it seems absolutely necessary. I will state a few facts which you, Dr. Pogue, know to be true:

"I have it from the most reliable sources that you met Miss Olive Bentley in France," Carlton McLain continued, his voice under perfect control. "It is there that you fell in love with her, and the lady reciprocated that feeling. You told her you were a married man, but that did not make the least difference to Miss Bentley.

"She continued in loving you, and you continued meeting her. You continued doing this in spite of the fact that you both knew it was wrong. And to top it all,

you promised to make her your wife as soon as you procured a divorce from Vera Browning, the actress.

"Vera Browning received an urgent request from you that she should agree to a legal separation. However, in spite of your oft repeated, and most earnest solicitations, she refused to consent to a divorce.

"How you felt about the matter, is not hard to guess. And all of us can well imagine it. There were repeated and very bitter quarrels between you and your wife. Last night, according to Tessie, your wife's maid, you quarreled again. You——"

"I don't see why I should allow you to speak in that manner about my private affairs," Dr. Pogue interrupted at this point. "You have no right ——"

"I have every right to state true facts in a case like this one confronting us," McLain broke in with a sardonic grin. You can not deny that you quarreled last night with your wife. It is an established fact. Now then, let us see what happened afterward.

"During the night someone entered your wife's room and killed her with chloroform. This thing of talking about a burglar having committed the murder, is all bunk. Not a single thing was stolen.A burglar would have taken all the valuables and jewels within reach. This explodes the burglar theory.

"Your wife's jewels were found intact under her pillow. So far as is known now,there is only one man in the world who had an interest in the fact whether Vera Browning lived or died.

"That man," Carlton Mc Laln concluded, flinging a hand accusingly and dramatically at Dr. Pogue," was you. I am firmly convinced in my own mind, and I positively believe that you killed your wife in order to be in a position to marry Olive Bentley."

In the intense silence the speaker's words fairly

rang with fervor and vehemence.

He had made a most frightful accusation.

Those who had listened to it fully expected to see the physician fly into a rage and make a general denial. Nothing of the sort happened. Dr. Pogue did not fly into a rage nor did he deny it. He stood with his head bowed, and his fine eyes filled with sorrow.

None of the men were aware that others had been listening to Mc Lain's bitter accusation.

The doctor's heart pounded in his throat when a sudden stir near the door became noticeable. He turned swiftly in that direction and he saw Olive Bentley enter with Mrs. Galvin and Ruth Gordon.

Of the men present, McLain was the most surprised and also chagrined. What evil fortune brought them here at this particular time? He saw instantly that Ruth had been weeping, and he made a quick gesture, warning her to remain silent.

"You ——you here?" gasped Dr. Pogue,facing Miss Bentley.

"Yes,why not?" she answered softly. "And what is more,I have been listening to what Mr. Mc Lain said about us a moment ago. Let me assure you that I am not the least bit worried."

"But what brought you here?" the physician inquired gravely.

"My little friend over there," Miss Bentley responded indicating Ruth Gordon. "She has made a confession to me. And I dare say, it was a most extraordinary confession.

"Ruth tells me that she came to this house tonight with the purpose of perpretating a joke. Unfortunately, however, the joke turned out badly. Yes,it turned out very badly," she repeated in a louder tone. "There is something of which you all were evidently not aware.

Ruth did not come alone!"

At this unexpected declaration all eyes were turn- to the trembling young Chicago girl.

She looked up and seemed to see no one but the man whose companion she had been — — Carlton Mc Lain. He was stark white and passion shook him. It was utterly impossible to tell Ruth to remain silent. It could not be done without arousing suspicion.

But in spite of that he made an attempt to speak. Ruth beat him to it.

"I came with Mr. Mc Lain," she said courageously. "He planned the thing and persuaded me to take part. We gained entrance through the library window. It was our intention to steal that oil painting just for fun. Mr. Mc Lain was not satisfied with that.

"He insisted that we must take something of greater value. He left me waiting in the library while he went upstairs. I followed him a little way and saw him come out of Dr. Pogue's room——"

"That was Dr. Pogue!" Mc Lain interrupted desperately. "I saw him. Yes,I saw him the same as you did ,Ruth!"

But what Mc Lain said could not remove the incalculable damage the girl had done to his case. She had seen him come from Dr. Pogue's room and she did not seem at all uncertain about it.

"Why ,it could not have been me!" he exclaimed. "I went———"

"It was you!" Ruth Gordon broke in quickly. "It was not Dr. Pogue!"

"But it was Dr. Pogue!" he insisted.

"No, it was you———you!" the girl reiterated. "I am absolutely positive!"

As Carlton McLain glared about defiantly, he he saw blank incredulity on the face of every person in

the room. He saw Dr. Pogue take a swift step toward him. He saw Mr. Galvin approach him from another direction. What McLain dreaded, had come.

Sudden panic drove all caution from his mind.

He whipped a gun from his pocket. But Guy Fillmore,on the alert and ready, pinned Mc Lain's arms behind him. As Dr. Pogue leaped, the weapon exploded and the doctor fell in a heap.

There was a scream followed by another.

The jig was up, and no one knew this better than the murderer himself!

But they were not going to hold him in this room. He was determined to gain the outside no matter what the cost.

With the strength born of desperation, he fought until he was free from Guy Fillmore's encircling grasp. Old man Galvin he shook off with a quick move and an oath. The door stood open only a few feet away.

In that direction his bloodshot eyes were fixed.

The turmoil was terrific!

Olive Bentley and Mrs. Galvin were vainly trylng to remove Dr. Pogue's prostrate form from the scene of battle. Ruth Gordon leaned, half fainting, against the wall.

"Let me go, or I'll kill you!" McLain screamed at young Fillmore.

"You won't get the chance!" the latter retorted fiercely.

And then the struggle for possession of the gun began. Carlton Mc Lain was a man possessed of great strength. And the fact that his only safety lay in instant fligth, added force to his assault.

But it became evident that he was no match for his younger antagonist. Guy Fillmore had been fullback at Yale, and he was a veritable demon when it came to

rough and tumble fighting.

Then McLain had old Mr. Galvin to contend with. This gentleman was becoming more and more obnoxious in the furious battle.

McLain felt the gun torn from his grip. He cursed viciously.

With a last despairing effort he managed to free himself. In his mad charge toward the door he brushed against Ruth Gordon.

The girl uttered a scream as she went whirling and crashing against the wall. The last she saw of McLain was the murderous look he gave her.

With all the speed he could master, McLain ran out into the hall and downstairs with Guy Fillmore in hot pursuit.

Not until it was too late did Carlton McLain realize that flight itself was a confession, complete and absolute. He realized, too, that he was irrevocably lost unless he made good his escape.

But where was he to go?

Where could he hide without being found? A fast motor boat might save him, but there was none available. Nevertheless he must get away from Bar Harbor or be captured.

Coming out of the house, he faced the dawn. Low along the horizon east and north, a line of gray was assuming the hues of orange and crimson. The ocean lay quiet. Not a ripple could be seen.

Out of the shadows which still lay along the water, came the popping of the exhausts of scores of fast motor boats. Ah, if he only could commandeer one of them right now.

Carlton McLain did not pause in his flight for these meditations. Terror overwhelmed him, for he was in danger of being caught.

He leaped toward the boathouse. Then he heard a scramble and a low exclamation behind him.

Looking behind him, he saw that Guy Fillmore, still in hot pursuit, had stumbled and fallen. The young man lay still for an instant,then sat up as though half stunned.

Mc Lain had a momentary impulse to turn back and fight. But he changed his mind quickly and ran on with increased speed.

He crouched among the shrubbery, his desperate thoughts racing, seeking some avenue which might give a chance of safety.. But to his cold dismay, he saw that he was penned in on that cursed island securely enough. Ultimate capture seemed inevitable.

However, he was still free.hampered by no bonds. And he figured that so long as he could cling to this freedom.there was still a chance for him.

The light was growing stronger. In a little while the search for him must become so intense that he could not escape it where he was.

The police, already sent for, must be coming. If he could only find a secure hiding place until dark.

He realized that he might well hope to hide successfully for the space of the coming day in the spruce woods which covered one end of the island.

If a man foud but shelter within them.chose his spot well and lay still, searchers might pass within six feet of him in vain.

But in order to get into the woods.he must move quickly. Where he crouched.the steep wall of an abandoned old stone quarry lay between him and this much desired temporary refuge.

He must go down to the shore in order to reach the path that led to the woods.

As soon as he emerged into the open, Guy Fill-

more instantly appeared at the foot of the path between him and the sanctuary he craved.

Mc Lain hesitated, trying to force himself to attack his relentless pursuer and break past him.

Guy Fillmore came on relentlessly. The fugitive lost his nerve and turned to run uphill. He labored desperately up the rather steep slope and his overburdened heart pounded in his breast.

He saw the water tower ahead, and he welcomed it as the end of the climb which was torture.

At the same time he saw — and panic swept him at the sight——Dr. Pogue coming up the hill on the other side.

"By God!" Mc Lain swore, "I thought I fixed him for good!"

It was very evident that Mc Lain had not fixed Dr. Pogue for good. For the physician was running, not fast — and with a limp, but still he was running.

Ruth Gordon was behind Dr. Pogue. In the rear came old Mr. Galvin, armed with a club.

"Damn them—damn them all!" McLain gasped, his breath whistling through his teeth. "If I only had a gun, I'd make short work of everyone of them!"

But he had no gun nor any other kind of a weapon that might prove satisfactory in this frightful crisis. There was only one thing to be done now. He must pass Dr. Pogue, and he tried for greater speed.

After a stride or two, he saw that the physician would block his way. Before he could fight his way past, young Fillmore would be upon his heels.

He stopped dead, his eyes twitching to the right and left. To the left, down the hill, the big house itself shut him in.

To the right was the great pit of the stone quarry cleft in the earth.

His eyes darting that way, saw that the water tower was not set exactly on the rim of the quarry. A narrow ledge lay between. He might pass through there and escape to the other side.

He swung in the angle between the carved wall of the tower and the fence, which protected the lip of the quarry.

The fence was built upon the structure of the tower. He leaped over it, holding to it with one hand. And now he saw that the way between the tower wall and the quarry's brink pinched out to scant six inches.

He could not pass that way.

Guy Fillmore was not ten yards away. McLain flung a desperate glance over his shoulder. He stood upon the very lips of the quarry, clinging to the iron fence.

His eyes dived into the great pit below him, fastened on the ledge perhaps three feet wide and twice as many below where he stood.

In another instant young Fillmore's hands would have reached his, would have clutched his arm. He lowered himself, dropping a few inches and fell to his knees.

Fillmore, overhead, his automatic gun ready, cried pantingly:

"I've got you! Come out of there!"

At this McLain laughed abruptly, and his laugh was terrible. He was insane with inaction, insane with relief because he was still free.

The threat of the automatic revolver did not move him, for he felt sure somehow that Fillmore would not shoot.

Not more than six feet separated them. Fillmore would hardly dare come down lest they both topple into the gulf below.

McLain perceived this and flung his taunt into

the other's teeth.

"Come and get me!" he defied.

That instant Fillmore threw a leg over the rail, but Ruth Gordon, now right upon him, called to him to stop. When he persisted she threw her arms about him.

"No—no, Guy, I won't let you go down there," she cried.

She stared down at McLain in horror and he laughed at them both.

Guy Fillmore tried to shake her off. His hands were gentle, but his tone was firm.

"Please, Ruth," he begged.

"He'll throw you down into that awful quarry and you'll break every bone in your body," she retorted. "Don't go—I won't let you."

Chapter 70

A HORRIBLE PUNISHMENT

RUTH GORDON was in tears by this time, and there was a look in her eyes which told plainly what was in her young heart. McLain, from where he stood, was quick to see that these two were dead in love with one another. Why could this new bitterness not have been spared him.

While they were still struggling he suddenly saw a way to elude them. His glance flitted along the granite wall and saw that it was not actually perpendicular, though from above it seemed to be.

He discovered jutting shelves here and there where rocks had been removed. He was able even from where he crouched, to pick out a course diagonally forward and downward for quite a distance.

If he could go that far, he could go farther. And if he could reach the bottom the cover of the woods to the left would be within his reach.

So he crawled forward to the edge of the ledge, reached down his foot to the one below and thus began his descent.

Guy Fillmore and Ruth Gordon, lost in their mutual discovery of young love, failed to see what the fugitive was about to do. But Dr. Pogue and old man Galvin saw.

The physician uttered an exclamation which attracted Fillmore's attention anew.

The latter leveled his gun and seemed about to shoot.

"Don't do that, my boy," Dr. Pogue said and res-

trained his arm. "No use resorting to that sort of violence. McLain can't get away."

"I want to get a hold of him!" the young man cried impatiently. "I want to get my hands on him. You don't know what he has done to—to this girl," indicating Ruth. "I'll tear him to shreds."

The physician shook his head.

"No, you must not," he retorted. "I have first claim upon that man's life."

And then Guy Fillmore dropped his gun.

"Look—look, he is getting away!" suddenly cried old Galvin.

Dr. Pogue smiled grimly.

"He can't get off this island," he said.

Then a shadow moved behind them. The physician turned and saw Olive Bentley.

They were all silent then, and young Fillmore's arm encircled Ruth Gordon's shoulders while they watched the fleeing man's progress.

McLain had gone forward perhaps fifty feet, and he turned to wave a derisive hand in triumph at his pursuers. A madness was upon him. He seemed to move with easy assurance upon his dangerous path.

Those watching him remained in awed silence. Once the two women shuddered and shut their eyes.

It seemed that McLain must lose his footing any moment and dash down into the bottom of the quarry to certain death. But nothing of the sort happened.

Finally Guy Fillmore grew uneasy. He turned to Dr. Pogue.

"He is getting away too far," he said. "Don't you think I could cut him off below?"

"Look!" was the physician's only answer.

They saw that McLain had dropped on his face along the ledge and was moving sidewise, preparing to

lower himself by his hands to a narrower one below. He managed the maneuver, hung by his finger tips, and let go.

But this ledge on which McLain now stood was in fact the upper edge of a flat slab perhaps ten feet across, and a foot thick, which had been loosened in the progress of working the quarry.

A crack had formed behind it. In this, each winter, water had collected and frozen, wedging the slab farther from its precarious equilibrium.

The process of its overthrow must have been well-nigh completed before the slight jar of McLain's weight turned the scale.

The silent watchers above had their first warning when they saw McLain's desperate fingers reaching the hold they had abandoned. Only then they perceived that the great slab was slowly tilting outward from the wall.

Its movement was scarcely perceptible. But it was moving, and was a terrible thing to see.

It moved an inch, three inches, as slowly and as smoothly and as relentlessly as the fates about their tasks.

At first McLain's finger tips almost touched the hold they had loosed, and then the gap became wider. No sound came from him. He was working in silent fury to save himself.

The watchers above saw McLain bring himself between the slab and the wall from which it fell away. He disappeared from sight for an instance, and then appeared again.

He had by a superhuman effort succeeded in getting a grip on the lower edge of the slab.

They saw his body spread flat upon the huge stone, his arms hooked over the edge, his feet working as feet do when one seeks to climb. But he could get no grip on

the smooth granite.

Then the big slab struck a jutting corner of the wall, and turned over like a falling leaf and McLain's body was dislodged.

They had an instant's glimpse of it, falling as an empty garment falls with fluttering arms and legs. In the bottom of the quarry was a deep, wide pool of water.

Into this the unfortunate man's body dropped with a soft splash. Even an ordinary swimmer would have escaped death by swimming.

But there was that immense slab of stone to be reckoned with. It's progress had been halted by jutting rocks and stubborn bushes.

Down and down it went with unfailing aim.

Everyone above had turned away except Guy Fillmore. He saw McLain's head appear for a fleeting moment, then shut from view by the falling rock.

He thought he heard a faint scream, and then came that awful silence which always follows a dreadful catastrophe.

Carlton McLain's end was made doubly sure. If he had not drowned, the immense weight of the stone must have crushed him.

"I guess that is the last of him," Fillmore heard himself saying.

"The end of what?" Ruth Gordon breathed.

"Carlton McLain, the murderer. He is dead."

The young girl broke into tears and went hysterically until Olive Bentley came over and took her in her arms.

There was a long moment of harrowing silence. Only an occasional sob disturbed it. Then the group of five separated. Dr. Pogue joined old man Galvin and Guy Fillmore.

For a few minutes they talked in low tones.

"You can do as you please about that hound," Fillmore exclaimed in answer to something the physician said. "I won't lend a hand in fishing him out. Let the police do that."

After some discussion it was finally decided to follow Guy Fillmore's suggestion.

While Mr. Galvin remained on the scene, Ruth Gordon and Olive Bentley were taken home. But neither Dr. Pogue nor young Fillmore, who had accompanied them, came into the house.

Much craved to be said between these two couples which had to be deferred until the horror of the double tragedy wore off. The girls stood on the veranda with their arms about one another waist.

The expression in Olive Bentley's eyes was hard to define. The sudden death of Vera Browning was of tremendous import to her.

It removed the only barrier which for years stood between her and the realization of a cherished dream. Yes, she loved Dr. Pogue.

She had loved him unceasingly since their first meeting in that field hospital in France during the war.

There never had been any love between Dr. Pogue and Vera Browning. To the actress he had been nothing more than a means to an end. He had pleaded with her to divorce him, but she refused because of religious scruples.

A deep sigh drifted from Olive's lips. Hers was an emotion not easy to control. Dr. Pogue still loved her. His every act and glance told her so.

She pressed her young friend a little closer, uttered a short hysterical laugh, and then burst into tears.

Ruth Gordon led her inside. The situation in which the pretty Chicago girl found herself in was not quite the same, but none the less happy one.

She had learned to love Guy Fillmore with all the strength of her young nature.

She had but one regret. She felt guilty, to a degree of having had a part in the double tragedy.

Perhaps Carlton McLain would not have gone to the Browning home on that mad expedition had she refused to go with him. And perhaps McLain would not have been driven to his frightful death if she had remained silent.

But after her tearful confession to Olive Bentley she was urged to tell the absolute truth. So when she told that she saw McLain emerge from Dr. Pogue's room, it settled McLain's fate.

While her mind went over all these details, she stole a glance now and then at her loyal friend.

She owed much to Olive Bentley. Ever since her coming to Bar Harbor, Olive had done everything within her power to make her forget the unhappy past.

And then Ruth thought of her brother. What would Phil say when he read the news of the double tragedy in the paper? She was sure that the name of every person connected with it would be mentioned.

Her first impulse was to leave for Chicago at once and tell him the story so far as it involved her before he heard it from another source.

But when she broached the matter to Olive Bentley, the latter quickly objected.

"You are one of the most important witnesses, my dear child," Miss Bentley said gravely. "You can't afford to run away because if you do, the authorities might jump at the conclusion that you had a hand in Vera Browning's murder.

"Only a person who has something to conceal thinks of flight in a case like this. For your own sake you must stay, Ruth. The people of Bar Harbor must be

convinced that you had absolutely nothing to do with the crime."

Ruth Gordon turned pale.

"But I have nothing to conceal," she protested.

"I know you haven't," Olive agreed heartily. "That is why I want you to stay."

"But my brother," the young girl began, a look of fear in her eyes. "He must know the truth, and I want to tell him before——"

"Don't worry about that," Miss Bentley interrupted as she patted Ruth's head. "I am going to write him a letter this very hour explaining everything. I don't think you have anything to be afraid of so far as Phil is concerned. I am the one he will hold responsible.

"I promised him faithfully that I would take the best of care of you. Well, I haven't done it. I allowed you to become too intimate with McLain. I have not done my duty."

"Yes, you have," Ruth cried warmly, and reached over and kissed her friend. "You are not to blame in any way for what happened. Ah, if I only had heeded your repeated warning and remained away from McLain. Oh, why did I go with him last night.

"I might have known that he was up to some serious mischief when he suggested that we play burglers in Vera's house. He hated her because he believed she destroyed his manuscript. Oh, why did I go with him."

As Ruth finished the last sentence she broke into tears. But there was real comfort in the soft arms that went around her.

"Don't take it too much to heart, dear," Olive Bentley soothed. "Let us remember that every cloud has a silver lining. Some of us have to pay a big price for happiness. And," she added teasingly, "while you did not quite deserve it, you won an honest man's love.

"Guy Fillmore is a fine young fellow. I know he will make you happy. If I had a younger sister and she loved him, I would not put anything in her way. I believe I'd marry him myself if he would have me."

At this Ruth dried her tears and sat up straight. She gazed at Miss Bentley for a moment in surprised silence.

"How do you know all that, Olive?" she gasped.

"Because Guy told me," came back with a soft laugh. "Oh, yes, he was frank enough to tell me of his love for you. And it also was he who opened my eyes about McLain. It seems that McLain has been in several scrapes with women. Guy Fillmore knew about it."

After another lengthy pause Olive went on:

"Guy means to marry you, Ruth. I'm satisfied that he will make a good husband, providing you play fair with him. He is one of the most successful young newspaper men in New York. Vera Browning engaged him as her press agent at a big salary. The fact that he is now out of a job is of minor importance.

"Other famous stage stars will bid for his services. But whatever you do, dear, don't accept him unless you are absolutely sure you feel that you can be happy with him. Don't marry him merely to get a husband, for he loves you too well."

The young girl's eyes were swimming in tears. And there was an expression of joy on her lovely face.

"What you have just told me makes me the happiest creature in all the world," she cried, hugging Olive frantically. "I love Guy so dearly that I would give my life for him if he asked it."

"He will probably ask for it," Olive replied with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "But he'll want it for keeps —and all of it. There must be no more flirting on your part. Pay no attention to other men, no matter how hard

they may try to attract you.

"Your style of beauty allures. There is danger in it for yourself. A misplaced smile from you may start trouble. There are too many men at Bar Harbor looking for girls like you, dear. You must watch your step from now on."

Ruth Gordon grew suddenly very serious.

"Ah, then there never will be any trouble between Guy and myself," she said, her voice low and tense. "Once his wife, all my smiles, my body and my very soul will belong to him."

But other girls when in the throes of an overwhelming emotion have uttered these sentiments in almost precisely the same words and failed to live up to them.

Ruth Gordon, from her earliest youth had shown a spirit not entirely conducive to the promotion of her moral welfare. She was too apt to take matters in her own hands in a crisis of love.

Chapter 71

A HEARTLESS WOMAN.

WHILE Oak Manor, the magnificent summer home of the Gordons was filled with guests, merriment and gay laughter, the Angel of Death seemed to hover near. In its handsome little crib, neglected and almost forgotten by its mother, lay a tiny human being scarcely two months old, gasping for breath.

From time to time a convulsive tremor ran over the thin, chalky face and the fragile small hands clenched and opened spasmodically in mute agony.

Ever since its birth, Alice Gordon had confided the care of her baby to Nora Evans, a woman of an utterly selfish nature, hard, cruel, and possessed of a perverted mind.

The infant, brought into the world premature and in a weakened condition, never knew a loving mother's crooning.

When Alice was summoned for the second time within an hour to the room of her baby, she felt no pangs of conscience nor grief. Only a chilly apprehension shook her. If the child should pass away now, the ball scheduled for the night would never take place.

Phil would see to that. But she had set her heart upon this crowning social event. The very thought of being denied the pleasure of being called the belle of the ball, filled her with cold fury.

With her beautiful features set in hard lines, she followed Nora to the baby's bedside. But only for a moment did she look at it. She retreated almost instantly

as one appalled by a hideous vision.

"Don't you think we better send for the doctor?" Nora suggested.

The heartless mother shook her head.

"No!" she replied, shocked at the very idea. "I don't want the doctor to come here to-night. It could not be done without my husband finding out about it, and that would spoil everything. He is such a fool where kids are concerned."

An ugly grin crossed Nora's face.

"Alright," she assented with an indifferent shrug of her shoulders. "It's up to you, Mrs. Gordon. If the baby dies, don't blame me."

"I am not likely to blame you, idiot!" the mistress of the house hissed. "I'll assume the responsibility. All I expect you to do for the rest of the night is to stay with the baby and don't allow anyone to enter this room. And under no circumstances let my husband come in."

The girl shot the speaker a vicious glance.

"This is not the first time you called me a name," she said resentfully. "You better cut it out."

No one knew better than Alice did herself that she could not afford to offend this young woman.

One glance at Nora's dark features warned her that she had gone too far.

"I'll take it back," she murmured, her attitude changing quickly. "I should not have called you an idiot. But, you see, I am so wrought up, Nora. I am terribly afraid that something might happen to spoil the ball. I don't know what I would do without you."

"Neither do I," the girl answered meaningly. "You know I could make a lot of trouble for you if I cared to talk. That morning in the tower for instance, and——"

Alice flung out a hand in a gesture of fright.

"For heaven's sake, hush!" she begged. "Even

the walls have ears sometimes. I realize how much I owe you. But I am paying you a salary that exceeds any ever paid to a servant. And I'll do more than that. I'll double it if you remain faithful to me."

The suggestion pleased Nora Evans indeed.

"You can always depend on me, dear Mrs. Gordon," she said with a smirk. "I hope you enjoy that ball to-night."

"I think I will," the other smiled, and quitted the room.

Alice, on her way back to her boudoir, experienced a very uncomfortable feeling. She almost uttered a cry when she suddenly came face to face with her husband.

"Oh, pardon me," Phil said when he noticed the look of abject terror on his wife's face. "I did not mean to frighten you."

"But you did frighten me," she answered summoning a smile that was rather twisted.

"I was on my way to see the baby," he told her.

Alice was conscious that he eyed her narrowly as he spoke these words. Although her whole being filled with dread, she fought it down.

If Phil saw the baby in its present condition, there would be no ball to-night. She was determined to prevent that no matter what the cost.

"But you mustn't dear," she purred, laying a hand on his arm. "I just came from our little darling's room and she is soundly asleep. Please don't disturb her."

Phillip Gordon looked long and earnestly at his wife.

She was apparently the very essence of a loving mother deeply concerned about her child. He thought he detected a tear in her low, quivering voice. Her eyes met his frankly and without wavering.

Little did he suspect that Alice had uttered a de-

liberate lie.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "If the baby is asleep I don't want to disturb her."

With that he walked past his wife, who breathed a sigh of the most intense relief. But Alice did not go to her boudoir at once. She remained where she was and gazed after Phil somewhat uneasily.

Not until she saw his tall figure grow smaller as he walked down the stairs did she move from the spot.

The look on her face was not good to see.

This night of all nights she meant to demonstrate to this cold, indifferent husband of hers how other men valued her beauty and charm.

An hour later the guests especially invited to the ball began to arrive. And what a brilliant gathering it was.

There was a bewildering array of feminine loveliness, a riot of color and flashing of jewelry that dazzled the eyes, which sought and found relief in the sober evening dress worn by the gentlemen.

But among this assemblage of splendidly gowned and beautiful women, Alice Gordon stood forth as the peerless queen.

She moved between the laughing and animated groups with an astonishing grace of limb that gave her every movements that of a lithe, female panther.

She was the center of an admiring throng of black-frocked social lions outdoing one another in the attentions to their distractingly, gloriously beautiful hostess.

Alice was well aware of the sensation she created among the men present.

Her triumphantly sparkling eyes, the heightened color in her cheeks and her general attitude showed how thoroughly delighted she was. Yes, this was indeed the night of all nights for her.

What mattered the human being—her own flesh and blood, who lay writhing in agony on the floor above?

Whether it lived through the night or not made no difference to this vain creature. She was pleasure-mad.

For the hour had come when men fell over one another to pay homage to her strange beauty and alluring charms.

The most persistent admirer of Alice Gordon was Willard Parker. This handsome scamp, in spite of his financial demise, was still regarded as a social celebrity and a man worth knowing.

This opinion was shared by most of the women present, but not by the men who knew him intimately.

Of course, they did not know that Parker had been engaged for a certain consideration to play the part of a lover to the hostess. He did this with a sincerity which caused some of the guests to wonder.

No one as yet suspected that this man had fallen desperately and helplessly in love with Alice.

When he saw her enter the ballroom, her alluring beauty went to his head like wine.

Her charms intoxicated him. As she spoke to him in a low voice the coquettish glance from her lustrous dark eyes served as a fuel to his love for her, fanning the blaze to the white heat of consuming passion.

In vain he waited for an opportunity to be alone with her, to crush her in his arms as he had done at the Walling Tea Room in Chicago.

Alice, as the evening wore on, flirted openly and outrageously with Willard Parker, casting all restraint and discretion to the winds.

A wild spirit of recklessness and defiance seemed to have taken possession of her.

Philip Gordon was not blind to his wife's scandalous conduct, but his face remained cold and impassive.

He had long ago learned to control himself before the eyes of the world. Not with a single word or action did he betray the furious anger which raged in his breast.

Though what love he once had for Alice had been killed by her, he still had the right to demand that she conduct herself with the dignity and decency expected from a woman of her station.

All through the evening Alice had kept a close watch upon Phil. She sensed what was going on in his mind.

She saw more than once the expression of disgust on his face as they happened to pass. It filled her with unholy satisfaction to see him turn pale and his cheeks flush by turns.

"You had your chance," her taunting eyes seemed to say as they met his. "You treated me with cruel indifference. What could have been yours alone I am giving now to another."

But Alice discovered that she had not the entire monopoly on the handsome Willard Parker.

Several other women made a bold bid for his attention and succeeded to some degree. They liked him because he danced wonderfully well. And they loved him for his dash and daring.

During a lull in the festivities as refreshments were being served, the hostess drew the man aside.

"I wish you would take me out on the terrace, Willard," she said under her breath. "I am dying for some fresh air."

Parker assented with alacrity. This was the opportunity he had been patiently waiting for. They walked arm in arm from the room, utterly indifferent to the curious glances which followed them.

On and on they strolled in silence, until they came to a secluded spot.

"Now then, give an account of yourself, my dear boy," Alice murmured as she whirled upon him. "What do you mean by flirting with those other women when you were engaged to devote yourself entirely to me."

He laughed softly.

"Why, you are not jealous, are you?" he countered, taking a quick step toward her.

When Mrs. Gordon failed to reply, he took her by the shoulders and looked deeply into her eyes.

And when she showed no resentment at this familiarity, he lifted both of her hands to his lips and covered them with fiery kisses.

"Alice!" he cried. "I was a fool to come here!"

"Why?" she asked innocently.

"Why? You ought to know why. I have fallen in love with you. Yes, it is true—God help me." Willard Parker released the woman's hands and stepped back a pace. "—I can't go through with this. It is not fair to your husband. I feel like a——"

"You foolish boy," Alice interrupted him with one of her most tantalizing smiles. "Do you suppose I would have asked you to take me out here if I did not care for you?"

He uttered a low exclamation and would have crushed her to his bosom right then and there, but she evaded him with a mellow, teasing laugh.

"No, not now, Willard," she objected. "We must be careful. Come, there is a nice comfortable bench over here. Let's sit down and rest for a while. But," she added, shaking a warning finger, "you must behave. It is quite possible that some of the guests came out here for the same purpose as we did.

"There would be no end of scandal if they caught me in your arms. I happen to know that several women here to-night would welcome a chance to have the right

to say ugly things about me."

But there was no stopping the man.

He was beside himself with burning passion, and he held the faintly struggling woman to his breast and kissed her as she had never been kissed before.

A slight rustling came from the other side of the shrubbery which concealed them.

The bench hidden there held the form of a woman, whose white features were raised heavenward. It was none other than Marie Desmond, the governess.

She too, had come out for a breath of fresh air, although she was not one of the participants in the festivities.

Such frivolities had lost their charm for her.

And she would never have been able to stand the torture of seeing Phil's second wife acclaimed not only as hostess, but laso as the most beautiful woman at the ball.

After sauntering aimlessly through the grounds for a while, Marie had seated herself.

With a heavy heart she listened to the sounds of music and mirth which floated through the silent night. Her thoughts wandered back to the time when she, a happy wife and mother, had been privileged to receive the guests at Phil's side.

Pressing her hands to her face she sat quiet for a long while.

Not until she heard the murmuring of voices did she look up. She recognized that of Alice instantly. But the man with her was not Phil.

She heard the terms of endearment spoken. And she heard far more than that. A feeling of indignation and disgust came over her.

She wanted to rise and flee from the spot, but some strange power held her in check. Utterly stunned by

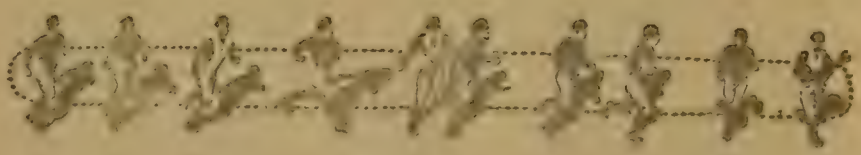
her discovery she remained motionless.

And this was the woman who now bore Philip Gordon's honored name.

Her heartstrings contracted sharply. She waited until the guilty couple rose and strode back to the ballroom, then also rose slowly and walked to the house as if in a trance.

At first she felt inclined to go directly to Phil and tell him of his wife's perfidy.

But upon second thought she decided to keep silent. If she spoke she convicted herself of eavesdropping, and besides, why didn't Phil keep an eye on his wife? Why did he deliberately allow her to drag his name into the mire?



Chapter 72

A TRAGIC SITUATION.

MARIE'S mind was still in a turmoil when she reached the rear stairway which led to the servent's quarters and the nursery. None of the servants had as yet gone to bed, and most of them were needed to help take care of the guests. In the rear hall on the second floor the governess came face to face with Nora Evans.

The latter gave her an impudent stare and passed on.

But Marie did not mind that in the least. She had long since become used to that girl's snubs and insults.

As she opened the door to the nursery and peeped in cautiously, she noticed that Harry and Phyllis were soundly asleep. With a smile such as only can beautify a true mother's countenance, she closed the door again and turned to go to her own room.

She was not a little surprised to see Annie enter hurriedly and very much excited.

"What's wrong?" Marie inquired, gazing at the intruder apprehensively.

"Oh, Miss Desmond!" she cried, her breath coming fast. "Just think, Nora told the dining room girl a moment ago that Mrs. Gordon's baby is very low and can not live through the night."

Marie, who had begun to disrobe, stopped and stared at the girl unbelievingly.

"Has the doctor been called?" she wanted to know.

Annie shook her head.

"No, he hasn't even been told that the baby took a turn for the worse," she answered.

"But why not, Annie? That seems like criminal negligence to me. I am sure if—if Mrs. Gordon—" it was hard for Marie to pronounce the name, "had been told she would have sent for Dr. Van Buren at once."

"Don't you believe it," Annie exclaimed. "Not she. Imagine her putting that ball off because of a sick baby. She knows that her baby has been having convulsions all evening. She——"

"What?" interrupted Marie, aghast. "You mean to tell me that that woman knew, and did not call the doctor?"

"Yes," came back promptly. "And that is not the worst of it. Mrs. Gordon has given Nora Evans strict orders that Dr. Van Buren is not to be called until to-morrow morning. That poor little mite must suffer and perhaps die while her mother dances and amuses herself."

With tears of pity in her eyes and rage in her bosom, Marie rushed past Annie and out of the room.

The next minute found her at the telephone. Fortunately Dr. Van Buren was home, and she asked him to come at once.

At first the physician demurred owing to the lateness of the hour.

"But it is a matter of life and death," Marie pleaded.

"Very well, I'll come," he acquiesced.

Then Marie entered the room which Nora Evans occupied with the baby. To her amazement the infant was alone and in another convulsion.

So far as she was able to judge, nothing could be done to relieve the little sufferer.

With the tears streaming from her eyes she watched the horrible distortions on the baby's features.

Continued in next number

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